

(Music)

PAMELA WARD: Our office was founded in the 1960s. There was a concern about how the U.S. Government would make sure that good educational options were available around the world for the children of U.S. government employees who were posted at embassies and consulates. The DOD model was looked at, and it was decided that probably most of us who serve overseas would prefer that our children go to school with kids from all over the world rather than just Americans.

So the Office of Overseas Schools was established to assist a network of – which is more than 200 private international schools at posts all over the world. We've evolved a great deal since then, and but our goals remain the same: and that is to promote quality education overseas for U.S. government and U.S. dependents and to develop model American schools to promote mutual educational, cultural and understanding for all.

The second one is very interesting because the whole special needs piece fits into what we hope we are doing with the schools that we assist overseas and with other schools that we work with. The – when I went in the foreign service in 1980, if you had a child with special needs you did not go overseas. There was a great deal of federal legislation in the U.S. during the 1990s. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which Stan mentioned a minute ago, and the Americans with Disabilities Act – the whole level of thinking about people with special challenges changed.

Now, although we deal with private schools that are not in the United States and are not subject to federal law, it was decided that we would do the very best we could to make families with special needs children worldwide available and that would, through encouragement, through education, and through counseling with families try and find appropriate placements with these private schools in many countries so that families could go abroad and have their children's needs met.

The services that we provide to the schools are of a consulting type. So every once in a while a parent will call me and say, you know, well, make the school do this. You give them money. You know, they must take my child; they must provide this sort of support. That doesn't happen. Even private schools in the U.S. do not have to provide for special needs children. They are not subject to IDEA or any of the other subsequent legislation.

Therefore, the work we do with international schools is of an advisory nature. And we also collect information so that we can work with you to determine whether or not a particular post or a particular school is going to meet the needs of your child. We encourage our assisted schools to provide accommodations whenever possible. Sometimes it's not possible.

I have schools in West Africa with 20 kids. You know, these schools cannot afford to have specialists on their staff. Even our larger schools very frequently don't have the kinds of specialists you find in U.S. public school divisions. They don't have speech therapists or occupational therapists or reading specialists.

And, you know, when Stan was talking earlier about the MCI – about the medicals capability information – that is very important because sometimes parents and families have to put together a series of services. You may find a school at a post that can meet your child's educational needs, but you may need to look for a speech therapist in the community.

So you may have to use a variety of different – in the U.S. now we have a sort of one-stop shopping because the good public school divisions are required by law. They have speech therapists, they have occupational therapists, they have psychological counselors on staff. This is not true of international schools. And not because they don't want to; it's because of the size and the economics. They cannot afford to staff the way U.S. public school divisions do.

We encourage these schools to provide as much support as possible, sometimes by having one or two specialists on staff in the larger schools. We also provide a lot of training. For example, this summer we're having two workshops – one of them in Miami and one of them in Alexandria, Virginia – that works with training teachers from international schools to use the inclusion model, which is considered to be best practices now – that is, youngsters with special needs are included in a regular classroom with as much support as they need from specialists.

In the fall of last year I took a consultant, a very experienced special educator, with me to two posts in my region in Africa, Nairobi and Pretoria, which – they were on the list of the 20 highest number of special needs kids. And what we did is we went and looked at local schools. And she reported back on 20 or 30 schools that are located in these posts that provide for youngsters with special needs.

And in some cases it was both an inclusive setting, and for kids who were profoundly impacted they tend – tended to not be in an inclusive setting. But they did give families an option for going overseas, especially to Africa because Africa is difficult. You will find that the developing countries – sometimes it's harder to find a school that will be able to accommodate your child.

On the other hand, sometimes the smaller schools are more willing to do simple accommodations. And several of you said that you had youngsters who had ADHD or a fairly straightforward learning disability. These are the kinds of challenges that do not require highly trained specialists.

If you have ADHD that is either controlled with medication or behavioral strategies, simple things like putting the child in the front of the classroom, giving them extra time on a test, will often take care of that

child's needs. You do not have to have a highly trained person. Therefore, if you have a school and a classroom that is willing – and often our small schools are much more flexible than our high-powered schools. So don't write off a place just because it has a small school.

I'm going to stop for a second. I'm an informal person, so if you have questions as we're going along that's absolutely fine. Please feel free to make this a conversation as opposed to a – to a lecture.

We have 197 schools that receive assistance. And that's the breakdown. In addition to the schools that receive assistance, as we travel – and we travel a lot – we gather information about other schools in the community. We cannot assist schools unless they are secular, non-profit, U.S. curriculum. We assist them by monetary grant.

However, in many of our posts there are schools that do not fall into that category but do provide an opportunity for youngsters with special needs. So we will very often visit those schools and have information on those schools when you come to talk with us about where you might be able to go with your child.

These are private schools. They receive a small monetary grant. We do not support them. It's not, again, like DOD, where they buy the books and they hire the teachers and they build the buildings. These are small, private schools and we give them a relatively small – well, the monetary grant is small- or medium-sized depending on how small the school is. For some of my schools it's really significant. But for the bigger schools, you know, not so much. It's a token grant for specific purposes.

I'd like to say, though, very often the grants are specifically designated for training for teachers in strategies for working with youngsters with special needs. The policies of these schools are determined by their boards of directors. And – which means policies including whether or not to accept special needs youngsters. And the stakeholders come from varied cultural backgrounds.

This is an important point because there are some cultures that feel very strongly that youngsters who have learning differences should not be in school with kids who are developing typically, which for us is somewhat shocking because it's very different than the American philosophy. However, even some Western European countries feel that kids who have special needs should be isolated.

There are also some parts of the world where the academic standards are extraordinarily high and schools are very competitive. These schools might not be good choices. That's where you need to talk with the regional education officers to find out the character of the schools and if our assisted school is not going to be a good fit for your child, whatever – what other schools might be available in the community that would work better.

Bob and Connie (sp), I was thinking their regions particularly have – the Western Europe and East Asia – many schools that are very high-powered academically. However, we have found that there are smaller schools, schools that have been – that are particularly good and work with kids very well. And they might very well not be our assisted schools.

Q: Can I ask a quick question?

MS. WARD: Yes, ma'am?

Q: Can you speak to admissions criteria among these boarding schools and what – if any of us might fall into a situation where admissions could become a problem?

MS. WARD: Yes. The – you might fall into a situation where admissions could be a problem because our agreement with our assisted schools is that they receive a grant from the U.S. government and because they do that they will accept youngsters who meet their admissions standards – which means that if you have a child with special needs they can say, no, we cannot accommodate your child because we do not – we do not have the staff, we do not have –

And I would say it's a small minority of schools where the will isn't there. I – and most of the international educators that I work with are very keen – as a matter of fact, in some places almost too keen because children have been accepted in various situations and then the family gets to post and it's clear that the child's needs cannot be met. And that's not good because you end up with families curtailing and everybody being unhappy.

So I encourage schools to be very sure that they can meet the needs. But I would certainly say that most educators want to meet youngsters' needs as far as possible. Is that – is that a reasonable statement do you think? Bob?

STAFF: Yeah. I think that – (inaudible) – mild and moderate, there's not anything the schools that – (inaudible) –

MS. WARD: Right.

STAFF: (Inaudible) – and that means different things to different schools. You know – (inaudible) – you know?

MS. WARD: That's a huge problem. Don't

STAFF: And just because we give some financial support to the school doesn't mean that the U.S. government employee children are the primary constituency or the most valued constituency that that school serves.

MS. WARD: That's right, absolutely. Many schools – many of our schools in Latin America have a vast majority of host-country nationals – have 70 or 80 percent host-country nationals. So, you know, there are schools in my region that have a lot of people from South Africa, from other places in the African community that really – and sitting on the board of directors – really influence the policy with regards to special needs. Connie (sp)?

STAFF: (Inaudible) – let me just say something I've noticed – (inaudible) – a phrase that we use that – (inaudible) – talking to the – (inaudible) – that is that many of the schools that we assist will accept a child who can meet the mainstream curriculum with a limited amount of support.

Now, how one defines limited – one school that I know of actually defines it as no more than one hour a day of support. But that's – I think if your child falls in that category you probably – it's probably worth you to look at the assisted schools. If it's beyond that I can't say that many of the schools in East Asia that are assisted are going to be able to accept the children.

Q: Can I –

MS. WARD: Sir?

Q: Just based on my personal experience – or our personal experience looking for – just taking to a lot of school and losing – not getting in. You'll find the American embassy part gets you a second, third review. You can go back and you say, think about it again. And then – you know, once – (inaudible) – calls and think about it again. And it just didn't work. And probably it wasn't a good idea to go because they couldn't help him. And so – (inaudible) –

STAFF: I think that – I think that's one of the things that's frustrating for us as regional education officers when we talk to families, is you sometimes have to say, if the school says your child will not succeed here, let's stop pushing. (Inaudible) – and, I mean, it's tough, particularly you – you know, you may have three other children going to that same school or something.

MS. WARD: You know, it's hard to – it's really a hard thing because sometimes people focus on a particularly career-enhancing job that they really want and so forth. But, you know, there are – there are options. There are – the option of homeschooling, there's the option of one parent staying in the U.S. with the child, if it's really that career critical. But it is not fair to anyone, most especially the child, to go to a place where the school cannot, for whatever reason, meet the needs.

And the thing that – I want to return to the thing that Bob met – Bob said earlier – is often schools will say they can accommodate mild or medium challenges. Well, how do you define mild or medium? How do you define the specific type of – for example, a child could have a mild type of learning disability, but need the assistance of a trained specialist. If there's not a trained specialist there, then the child is not going to get what they need. A child could have mild attention deficit disorder or something else of that sort and be very amenable to accommodations that a regular classroom teacher can provide.

Some of my tiny schools have been willing to have a child with autism attend the school with a shadow teacher, which Stan talked about earlier, because then – because they are small schools, they tend to be warm, friendly, accepting places. And this model will work where it might not work in some of the bigger more high-powered schools.

Q: Can I jump in too? The point that Connie brought up about if – the definition for mild learning disability is one hour of support a day. That still might not mean that there's a place for your child at that school. Personally, I know a school in – (inaudible) – that didn't have learning support, but they only had 20 slots for elementary and middle school. So if those 20 slots are already full, even if your child could be successful in that program with that support, they might not be – it might be a school that would be admitted in – (inaudible) –

MS. WARD: But – oh, I'm sorry, Vivian (sp); go ahead, Vivian.

STAFF: I would just say that, you know, like, these general terms, I look at it as (I'm ?) doing a painting, like, broad brush strokes, like, the mild to moderate. But we really encourage parents to send in a summary about their child, both strengths and documentation so that you're really upfront with the schools. So while you might get a general idea that this is mild or moderate, then the school needs to get the actual documentation from you so they can really get a better sense and maybe talk with you about the child's strengths and areas for improvement.

MS. WARD: Yeah, I think that's – I – that's a very strong and important point. They – we need to be talking about what specific accommodations they need, and going back to what Connie (sp) said, how much time they need and whether they need a specialist. So just generalizing about the challenge is not going to be helpful. Listing the particular accommodations that the child needs is going to be helpful.

And then, at the same time you're working with the school in terms of admissions, you may also want to be working with the CLO and with the medical person at post to determine whether or not that auxiliary services might be available in the community.

This is just a small list of the kinds of things that our office does specifically to encourage schools to develop a better program for youngsters with special needs to train teachers. And we also provide special

needs consultants who travel, who are very well-known specialists in the area of special needs in the U.S. and who travel to various posts around the world, to do teacher training and to do assessment of programs.

Yes, ma'am?

Q: Can you – (inaudible) – as to how many people you invite to each of these conferences – (inaudible)?

MS. WARD: Yeah. We can tell you exactly because we just counted them yesterday.

We invite any teachers who want to come to apply. Right now, we have 28 signed up for the brain research conference in Miami. Is that right, Connie (sp)?

Q: I think it's 29, and then 18 in –

MS. WARD: Eighteen in the other.

Q: – (inaudible) – yesterday.

MS. WARD: Right. That was yesterday. And that's from all over the world.

Q: We pay for them to – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: We give this – yes, we pay – we – they pay – the school pays their transport – or they pay their transport if they're coming home on home leave anyway – and then we pay – we give the school a grant for the cost of the conference and room and board and all expenses involved in the conference.

We also pay for other kinds of training as well –

Q: (Inaudible.)

MS. WARD: I'm sorry, yes. I've –

Q: I have a question about, you know, assessing the academic level of the schools. What I found very hard was figuring out – you know, you have these schools that have an amazing reputation as very challenging schools. And, you know, in our case, it was in Delhi. And then, you know, I ran into somebody who had a child in this school before and the child was in the same school as my daughter is now. And she said, ah, it's a joke compared to this school.

MS. WARD: You know, people ask me often, what are the best international schools? There's no – there's no answer to that question. It depends on the fit for the appropriate child.

Q: But is there some kind of, like, objective tool –

MS. WARD: No.

Q: – that we can use to compare – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: No, no, there's not. Actually, that's what we get paid for. There are six of us who are very familiar with the schools in our region. And we spend probably a third of our life or a fourth of our life at least on the road visiting schools and assessing schools. And we can give you our assessment based on the information we've collected of the rigor and the character of the academic program there.

But there is no, you know – you know, like the Newsweek list of colleges – sort of ranking of international schools because, to a very large extent, it depends on – now, when you say, the best, what are you comparing it to? Are you talking about SAT scores – which is not a very valid criteria to rank a school – or college admissions, or standardized tests? Or what exactly are you looking for when you're thinking about ranking?

Q: Well, I was looking – I was looking to try and figure out, you know, how challenging the school is in relations to schools in this area.

STAFF: You see – you see – (inaudible) – and that's one of the real struggles, right, that schools face, in terms of special needs children. They'll say, well, we're hesitant, sometimes, in going into accepting special needs children because that can affect the way people look at us – now we get perceived as being less academic than other schools just because we accept special needs children. So it's one of those things where we really dislike getting any – (inaudible) – kind of – (inaudible) – just because it really – then schools will be more hesitant and reticent than they are now in terms of accepting special – because they want to be viewed as academic, OK? Even though I think it's been demonstrated by now, schools, you don't need to give up on that by accepting special needs children – but nevertheless, it's in the mindset of people, you know?

I could – I remember, I was the director at Singapore American School in Singapore, OK, prior to starting this job four years ago. United World College was also a very good school in Singapore. And they didn't, at that time – would accept special needs children. But they had – there was this thing out in the community about United World College is more an academic than Singapore American School, even though we had 26 AP courses and – (inaudible) – all of that kind of stuff, you know, that was – (inaudible). But there's a perception, in a sense, going on there and that you – well, if you really want to be academic, that's where you should go. But so there is that piece; they're really concerned about that whole ranking – (inaudible) – because of these things – (inaudible).



One other thing I want to mention, Scott (sp), that you had raised regarding (the need ?) to push two or three times – there are a lot of schools that aren't aware of this accord that's available to diplomatic families from the U.S., right? And so I think that many times, when your schools are aware of that, they might be more willing to take a look at accepting a child because, you know, children coming from most diplomatic communities around the world don't get the kind of support that our government offers our families. And many of the multinationals don't you that kind of support. So I think that alone sometimes improves your case, you know, for – (inaudible) – it and get it.

MS. WARD: And some of the criteria that could be used for ranking is not valid – is not statistically valid. For example, if you look at average SAT scores, when you're dealing with a school that has a large number of youngsters whose first language is not English, that is going to depress – so it's very hard to come up with specific criteria. Schools do – on the school profile, they do publish the universities that children that children have attended. And I think, as a parent, that is something that I would want to be looking at for a secondary school. I think that that's very important.

I've – sort of anecdotally, most families that come back to the U.S. from overseas find that their children are well-advanced from public school divisions or even private schools in the U.S. But that's anecdotal. So –

Q: One more thing, just to echo what Bob (sp) and Scott (sp) said. Three years ago, when I was in Tokyo and I was visiting schools with our community members – (inaudible) – I asked each one of 17 schools that we visit – and I asked each one if they would accept a shadow teacher if we had a student coming. And not one would consider it. By the next year, when we actually did have a family bidding that had a shadow teacher component, and I called a couple of schools, they were willing because, again, they did not realize that they would be able to even – in this case, even help select the shadow teacher. So it was a real bonus for their entire faculty. So it really does pay to let them know about all these – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: Yeah. In one – in one post in my region, we put in a handicapped-accessible bathroom for one child. And we paid for that to be installed. And now it will be that – there forever. So that's an enhancement for the school. It was initially put in for one individual child. So some of these – of these – the things that we do have longstanding positive consequences for the schools.

One of the things I want to talk about a little bit is gifted. Gifted does not fall under the same federal legislation as other – as learning challenges. It – there is no federal legislation mandating gifted support. However, most of the better public school divisions in the U.S. do have gifted and talented programs. So we do provide a mechanism for identifying and serving youngsters who are gifted.

The – any – and this is run through our office, although ECS – you know, we often talk about giftedness, particularly with kids who are duly exceptional – but the gifted support goes through our office. We

provide the opportunity for youngsters to take a paper and pencil test from grade three upwards that can be sent from Johns Hopkins University and administered at post under the supervision of the management officer – very often, the CLO will administer the test – and then sent back. And if the child qualifies for gifted services based on that test, one the members of our advisory committee who is one of the leading – Dr. Nancy Robinson, who is one of the leading experts in gifted education in the U.S., will work with that family to provide – and we provide funding of about \$4,000 – though I think it's \$4,100 – supplementary allowance for gifted. And Nancy will help the family decide what to do with that funding whether they want to have an extra enrichment course or whether they want to use those – that funding for other types of support for a child who is gifted.

There – also, if a child has already been identified as gifted by a public school division, when your child is identified as gifted, you get a letter or piece of paper that says, that child is gifted. You don't need to go through the testing process; you are eligible for the \$4,000 allowance – also, if the school will write a letter saying that your child is working at a level that's well beyond that of their classmates.

And so we do provide support – both advisory support and financial support – for families who have youngsters who are gifted.

OK. This just talks about –

Advising families is the most important thing that we do. And as I said a minute ago in response to a question, your best resource is going to be your regional education officer and working in tandem with your social worker from the Employee Consultation Service. We travel a lot; we know which schools do provide services. We also know which schools might be more likely to have the resources that your child needs. We're on the road a lot, but you can keep – get in touch with us by email at all times; we all follow our email on a regular basis, even when we're overseas.

Q: Can you go back one – (inaudible) – because I wanted to mention – (inaudible) – first up at the top, we have on our – I don't know if it's our Inter-, but I know it's our Intranet – a list of schools and the services, so self-reported information – (inaudible) –

MS. WARD: It's on the Internet now.

Q: Internet, OK. She's also got – current services must be confirmed.

Another issue about this, too, is, a school may say, this is what we serve. That doesn't mean they can serve your child who falls in this category. But still – I mean, work with ECS on this – it's still on an individual basis. But this list is a start. You find a post that doesn't even have any schools listed, that might be telling us (something ?). So this is – this is something I want – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: It's a road map. Yes, that's very important that you do use these – all of these resources to identify – to cut down that bid list. And maybe you can cut it down to five posts. And then you're going to want to go to the REO and to the ECS – a social worker who will be able to give you more information about that particular post and that particular school. And that's the point at which you want to apply and send all of your child's records to the school – and most specifically the list of the exact kinds of accommodations, the kinds of services they've been receiving in the public school that – or private school that they've been attending.

OK. The – that's just something I just said – and this is – sort of the process. And people ask me this a lot, particularly overseas: What happens if my child was – you know, I have a little child and they just started kindergarten or first grade, and in first grade, the teacher says, you know, there's something not going well. The child is not learning to read or is not able to sit still, or for some other reason is not meeting the standards.

The first recommendation would be to contact the medical office at post, which may be your regional medical officer, it may be a nurse practitioner, it may be a psychiatrist – one of the regional psychiatrists.

Also – and this goes back to the comment you made a minute ago – I think that the first step should be to request the school to modify the program. And we can assist you with some recommendations in terms of ways in which they might be able to modify the program.

And, for example, in kindergarten and first grade, little boys have a very hard time very often sitting still. Early elementary school was designed for girls because little girls like to sit still and please the teacher and write neatly. Little boys, most often, do not. In some cases, this might be a child who will later turn out to have ADHD or learning disability; in some cases, it might just a level of maturity.

Also, there is a huge difference if the – because of the age gap. When you have a year's age difference, when you have the range of a child who was born in January and then – and one that was born the next December in the same classroom, there is a large maturity gap.

So I suggest to parents that they work with schools to see if there can't be some easy, nonpainful accommodations made. Sometimes a child needs to just be able to get up and walk around every once in a while, every half an hour. It's not reasonable to expect five- and six-years-olds to sit in straight lines for an hour or two hours or three hours, which happens in some schools. And certainly, some of the cultural influences – in my region, I – it's shocking to me because they have kids sitting in straight lines wearing these very stiff uniforms and standing up and saying, good morning, ma'am, and it's, like, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century from the perspective of U.S. education.

It's not – so it – a complaint on the part of the school might not necessarily mean that there is something wrong with your child. So I would strongly suggest – and if you want ideas of things that you can suggest to the school, please do come to us because that's – we're educators and that's what we do.

If you're in the U.S. and you're going to be going overseas, you should contact ECS. If you're not going overseas, then you need to talk with your school about what sorts of interventions have been tried. What can be done? Does the child need to be assessed by the school division?

School divisions: Even though you may own a house in that school division and the child may have gone to school in that school division, unless the child is currently enrolled, school divisions will not assess kids. And as a matter of fact, they're pretty cranky about it.

If you are either assigned overseas or going overseas – and if you're going overseas anyway, you're going to be working with your medical clearances – you need to go to ECS so that they can make arrangements for your child to be assessed by an educational diagnostician. And it needs to be one that ECS knows is going to produce the document that is going to be helpful for international schools.

Sometimes parents will put out a lot of money to have an assessment done and the product that we get is sometimes very technical with a lot of jargon, and that kind of thing is not useful for schools. You need to make sure you work with whoever it is in ECS who you – who is – who's your social worker and make sure that you go to a person who's going to do a really solid assessment.

It may be done in the U.S. before departure. It may be done at some places overseas with permission, and we were talking about London and Paris. Actually, one of the things that we're – I'm just in the beginning stages of working on is, our regional organization in Africa is thinking about having a circuit writer diagnostician who might go to various schools in posts and do diagnostics. But again, it's somebody that would have to be approved by our medical services and so forth. But there – because of course it's very costly to travel from Africa to some place to have that diagnosis done.

I'll let – you know, and if the – if a child is identified as having special needs, a letter of acceptance or an email – doesn't to be anything formal – from the school is required before an assignment is finalized.

Q: I'm sorry. Can you – (inaudible)?

MS. WARD: Sure.

Q: Is that before you bid or is that after the handshake or –

MS. WARD: Well, you know, honestly, you need to explain to me about the handshake. That's something that's come into the process of bidding after I left the foreign service. So what exactly – the handshake is a verbal agreement between an employee and the assigning bureau.

Q: (Inaudible.)

MS. WARD: Do they still talk about being paneled? Is – are people still –

Q: A handshake requires paneling. It is – it is to go to the panel but – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: Well, then, before you get a handshake, then you need to make sure that your child can go to that post. You need to get that letter of acceptance because if it automatically – after you do the handshake, if it automatically goes to paneling – because the paneling is the formal assignment process, and you should not be brought up for formal assignment unless you have a letter of acceptance.

Q: (Inaudible) – I'm sorry – when I was bidding with my second (directed ?) tour, I was giving a list of (preferred ?) posts. Before I could even put my list together, I had to do all my homework with the school. And we talked to all the schools and we went to the websites and we researched. (Yet ?) the schools would not accept the kids and would not put any post on my list. I ended up having only one post – kind of. And that's how I got my assignment. So we need to do the homework – (inaudible).

Q: If you're looking at several posts for assignments, that means you need several letters of acceptance before you can even go out and get a bid?

Q: My husband submitted 30 letters to schools with my son's IEP. And we got rejected by half of them. And he couldn't even put those on the list. So it really put – it delayed his bidding process because we needed a confirmation, yes, these schools will take my son. So because these schools said yes, then we could put that on the list. So I –

MS. WARD: Yeah, that's – absolutely. That's absolutely correct. You need – I know it's very frustrating.

And one of the things is, do not wait until the summer or Christmas vacation because schools – unfortunately, we have gone – we have reiterated with our assisted schools over and over and over, but they tend to go on vacation. And sometimes it's very hard to get a response. The correct person, whether it's the head of school or the special needs person, may be on leave. And sometimes it may be a matter of weeks. And we don't like that. And we've talked to our schools about that repeatedly. But also, just from experience, it is very important that you do it well in advance and try not to do it during the summer or Christmas. Don (sp)?

Q: When you're throwing at a wide net – so I'm talking about taking a look at what's out in the world – you got to go to this – to the list that their office has put together about the schools overseas that have identified themselves as having special needs kinds of programming. And that's on the website for the Office of Overseas Schools.

And then the second place is to go to the chat room FSspecialneeds at yahoogroups.com and to throw out the net there as well. So you're throwing out a wide net. Hopefully the net gets smaller until you actually come up with a bunch of places where you can send out the data and then get some feedback. And hopefully that coincides with being able to submit bids as well, in my opinion.

MS. WARD: (Bob ?).

Q: Just piggybacking on that, as you said previously, Pam, is that if you've got a – (inaudible) – by giving us a call, the REOs, we can probably tell you we need at least 10 – (inaudible) – and just save you the trouble of having this – trying to source out schools there, whatever else, because we'll – we will likely be able to at least help you narrow that list very quickly (in the end ?).

Q: Well, had my husband known about this, I'm sure he would have – (inaudible). (Laughter.)

MS. WARD: Yeah, that's our counseling function. And that's a very, very important part of what we do is that we should be able to point you in the right direction and also save you the time of going out in places that we know are not going to work for you.

Q: Related to this – and I think what Bob (sp) said is really important – we can also – I mean, particularly in the region that I work, in East Asia Pacific – in large cities, there are several schools – (inaudible). You may not know about some of the schools, and I know Leo (sp) in Tokyo made reference to it; he visited 17 schools. At this moment, I think we have children in Tokyo in 12 or 13 different schools; Beijing, 10, 15. So there are lots of schools you may not know.

Our Internet does have a list of different schools, and there are assisted schools. So we're just talking about making it as wide – making it as many options as possible. And those are the kinds of things (where ?) we could also say, no, you're not going to be able to go to the American school in Tokyo, but yet there's a such-and-such a school where we had good success (with ?).

MS.WARD: Yeah. And your REO is probably going to be the quickest way of narrowing the list down. And I – you know, and that's what we get paid to do, and that's what we care about doing. So –

Q: (Inaudible) – I would suggest is, go to the REO first, but also go to the website for the embassies. For instance, the CLO page on the – (inaudible) – Tokyo is equally as important – (inaudible, cross talk).

Q: (Inaudible) – people are using. And another – (audio break) – thing to add is, while talking about resources and growing our special needs program, when Connie (sp) came to visit Tokyo, we had one little boy who was having a really hard time. I think he was in school three. And Connie (sp) was able to go out and visit the school and really – (inaudible). And it was a program that would work for him and for other kids that might be coming to our post. So the list can grow.

MS. WARD: Exactly. Thanks – thanks to the – to the consultant that went with me to Johannesburg and Nairobi last fall, we now have 20 or 30 schools that are possibilities in that – at those posts where before we maybe had five. So, you know, we have – we do have a lot of information about various posts and are happy to help you with that.

OK. One of the things that people used to sort of say is that, well, these – I'm going backwards – these offices never talk to each other. As you can tell, this is totally untrue; we all each other on speed dial. We work together and work cooperatively. I think this has always been the case, but certainly in the last few years, we have made a huge effort. We also work closely with the Office of Allowances. We don't have a representative from the Office of Allowances today.

Q: (Inaudible.)

MS. WARD: Oh, good. OK. But they also – they're right down the hall from us. And, I mean, we go down there and pound on their door, you know. But they actually are very good. And some of the allowance questions that come up with regard to special needs can be quite complex. So I would encourage you to work with the Office of Allowances.

But if you also are welcome to come in to the REOs with an allowance question, we may be able to answer it very quickly if it's something that's come up many times before or we may need to send you to the appropriate person at the Office of Allowances. But we're very happy to work as a facilitator with regard – with regard to the allowances.

OK. There we go.

Alright, this goes through what we've been talking about in terms of how you find a school, identifying very – a number of posts with the CDO (ph). But you should not be bidding or agreeing to be proposed for a post unless you're sure that there is going to be a place for your child at that post because this – again, if it gets into the bureaucracy and then it doesn't work and you have to break an assignment at the last minute or take other steps, it's not going to endear your – endear you to the system very much and it really – it's not going to be good for your child if you do end up at a post where there is not appropriate educational services and auxiliary services that they may need.

OK. I'm just about finished. This is our website. Please, please, please look at our website. We have a great website that Carol Sutherland has put together and maintains. It has all the things that we've been talking about today. Please use that. Please put – we –

Q: (Inaudible) – Intranet – (inaudible).

MS. WARD: It's – pardon me?

Q: This is Intranet.

MS. WARD: This is Intranet. On the piece of paper I gave you is the Internet, I believe also.

Q: There it is, right there.

MS. WARD: This is right. This is the Internet and the Intranet.

Phone numbers.

These are the regional education officers.

And that is the end. Do you have any questions or comments or –

I think – I feel very positive about the fact that there is a post for every family, or more than one post. And it is a frustrating, sometimes time-consuming process. But there are a lot of people who are determined to make that go more smoothly for you and to talk with you at every stage, every step along the way – all the people in the room today, in the back, in the sides of the room, and many others. So I encourage you to please use us to make the journey more bump-free for your family.

(Applause)

(Music)

(END)